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AUTHOR Shannon, Paul
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ABSTRACT

Noting that covering the United States Department of Education can pose special problems for journalists, this report provides information about the operations of the department and notes the strengths and weaknesses of information produced by and about it. The first three sections of the report discuss the current political atmosphere at the department, the history of Federal involvement in education, and the structure of the department. The remaining six sections discuss specific publications key to monitoring the department's activities, education lobbyists, public documents useful in covering the department, the availability and reliability of department sources of information, nondepartmental sources of information and watchdog agencies, and education political action groups. (FL)

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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# THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: A REPORTER'S GUIDE

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION CENTER REPORT NO. 467**

**This report was written by Paul Shannon, an M.A. graduate of the University of Missouri School of Journalism.**

In October 1982, newspapers across the country reported a rise in the average scores on that year's Scholastic Aptitude Test. Blacks accounted for the largest gain as a group.

On the average, blacks taking the college entrance exam improved their scores nine points, compared with overall rises of one to two points. Combined with U.S. Bureau of Census figures stating that illiteracy among blacks had dropped from 79 percent to about 1 percent, the rise in SAT scores fueled arguments by the Reagan administration that budget cuts were not hurting minority students. [1]

Indeed, President Reagan told a meeting of the National Black Republican Council that the continuation of programs targeting minorities for special treatment would ensnare minorities in "welfare dependency."

The gains made by blacks were printed uncritically. So were the contentions of numerous administration officials claiming credit for successful educational policy. By newspaper accounts, the outlook for minority education appeared rosy.

But a journalist inquisitive enough to peruse education documents would discover a startlingly different picture. According to one report, that nine-point gain by blacks brought their average SAT score to 332. Whites averaged 442 on the test.[2]

The census bureau defines literacy as completing the sixth grade or demonstrating ability to read and write a simple declarative sentence. But the U.S. Department of Education defines literacy as being able to do simple tasks such as filling out a job application and balancing a checkbook. A person is literate, in other words, if he or she can function in a complex society. By that definition, 47 percent of black teenagers are illiterate; 75 percent of unemployed blacks lack the skills necessary to apply for a job.[3]

**U.S. News and World Report** published a 1981 article that told of the political forces campaigning for the elimination of the education department. The article noted that public support of the department was weak, citing as proof a poll conducted by the Public Service Research Council. More than 69 percent of school districts surveyed opposed the department if its establishment meant more federal control of local schools.[4]

A quick look through **Washington Representatives** yields a telephone number for the Public Service Research Council. A call reveals the council is a group dedicated to abolishing the department. After such a call, the reporter should be suspicious of the council's poll results. Familiarity with the education department's authorizing legislation — the U.S. Department of Education Organization Act — confirms those suspicions. Part of the act reads: "The establishment of the Department of Education shall not increase authority of the Federal Government over education or diminish the responsibility for education which is reserved for the States and local school systems."[5]

Hard-hitting information that can add to a story or be a story in its own right awaits the journalist who sifts through the mountain of information produced by and about the U.S. Department of Education. For the journalist investigating complex educational programs and issues, knowing where to look is essential.

**Summary**

This report discusses information available from the U.S. Department of Education, noting the strengths and the weaknesses of various sources of information.

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## THE MURKY WORLD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The education department poses special problems for the journalist. It is more a loose collection of bureaus than a philosophically consistent, centralized department. The diverse character of the department, in part, is purposeful. Congress considered diversity necessary to reflect the educational goals of a pluralistic society. But that character also is partly accidental. The department grew by accretion, as overlapping and disparate programs were applied to problems that had become too large to ignore. One investigator characterizes its work as a "complicated, murky, disjointed process spread through all levels."[6] The journalist must cover the department systematically, culling information from a wide range of documents and human sources.

The ability to examine documents critically and to find viewpoints other than those touted by officials who owe their job to the president is more important now than ever before. Reporters on education journals, education lobbyists and career bureaucrats in the department agree that traditional channels for the dissemination of information are suspect.

The department's Office of Public Affairs, which handles most requests for information, once had 25 people in its news division. They had regular beats, such as higher education, elementary and secondary education, and the inspector general's office. Each became expert in that area and developed sources for quick information. The news staff was cut to nine by 1982. According to one career bureaucrat, the result is that reporters now are routinely routed to political appointees heading the program in question. Unlike during the Carter administration — when appointees had fairly diverse views on education — most Reagan appointees' views conform closely to the president's policies. Reporters get only the political line. The appointees, according to the bureaucrat, think about the flow of information in one way: "How will it help old Ronnie?"

Some department officials have taken steps to ensure that information released conforms to administration policies. Wendy Borcherdt, chief of intergovernmental and interagency affairs, recently introduced the "Meeting/Briefing Approval Form." That form requires people in her office to seek approval of meetings with department outsiders and subsequently to report the content of such meetings. Borcherdt makes no excuses for the form, saying she wants statements to be in line with administration views.

Such ideologically motivated management of news also is evident in education department press releases. For example: A Nov. 12, 1982, release compared a $1.5 billion cut in the Guaranteed Student Loan Program, the largest of the student financial aid programs, with a college enrollment increase of almost 250,000. The release said the figures proved that the president's policies were not limiting access to colleges. Secretary of Education Terrel Bell was quoted as saying the figures were "heartening evidence that the Administration is cutting unnecessary aid without interfering with the delivery of aid to those in need."[7]

The release seems to be a quick, easy story. But the real story is the selective use of statistics to make a political point. The enrollment figure was not current at the time of the release. The 250,000 increase was a projected estimate made on Sept. 5 by the National Center for Education Statistics. By November that estimate had been revised. College enrollment in 1982 is at the same level as last year. In the three years before 1982, enrollment increased an average of 3 percent a year.

The release also compared statistics that aren't related, according to an education statistician. There must be evidence that different statistics have an effect on each other before they can be compared. Statisticians use a variety of tests, such as looking at several years of statistics to discern trends and to establish whether comparisons can be made. Says the statistician of the press release: "There is no evidence that the figures are related. It's like comparing sunspots and gross national product."

## THE HISTORY OF FEDERAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

The Land Ordinance of 1785 generally is considered the beginnning of federal involvement in the education of the public. That far-sighted act, which set aside one thirty-sixth of all townships for education facilities, did speed development of public schools. But like the tiny education bureau established after the Civil War and the limited vocational training funded after World War I, federal involvement was token. Education was a state and local matter.[8]

Federal involvement began in earnest during World War II. To strengthen the nation's defense, Congress funded short-term training courses for war-industry workers and aided schools serving burgeoning military camps. That involvement was accelerated in the early 1950s when the Office of Education was incorporated into a new Cabinet-level agency — the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.[9]

The space race further boosted federal support for the nation's schools. The successful launch of the Soviet satellite Sputnik in the late 1950s led to the perception that the Soviet Union was ahead of the U.S. in technological development. With national defense as an impetus, Congress began the boom years of education funding.[10] It established the National Science Foundation and passed the National Defense Education Act to update mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology curricula.

The legislative emphasis shifted from defense to social concerns in the mid-1960s. Congress decided that the federal government had to take the lead on certain issues, such as equal opportunity for access to educational resources.[11] The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the Higher Education Act and the Child Nutrition Act were put in place as part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs. Social concerns also dominated the educational legislation of the 1970s. That decade saw passage of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act and the establishment of a Cabinet-level Department of Education.

In 1930, education was alloted $11 million of the federal budget.[12] The Department of Education in 1981 had a budget of $15 billion.[13] Late in 1980, the White House issued a fact sheet saying, "The creation of the Department of Education symbolized the progressive intrusion of the federal government into an educational system that had traditionally drawn its strength from diversity, adaptability and local control."[14] In line with the Reagan administration policy of

eventually abolishing the department, Secretary Bell hopes to reduce the education budget to $8.8 billion and department staff by several hundred to 4,500 by 1983.[15]

## STRUCTURE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The department is currently divided into the Office of the Secretary, who is the Cabinet-level head of the department; the Office of the Under Secretary, who reports to the secretary and is responsible for management, budget, planning, evaluation, and intergovernmental and interagency affairs; the Office of the Inspector General, who conducts oversight of department programs and is responsible for the detection of fraud and abuse; the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, which administers grants and regulations aimed at public schools; the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, which assists handicapped children and adults; the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs, which attempts to increase citizens' English-language skills; the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, which trains youths and adults for work; the Office of Postsecondary Education, which administers assistance to universities and $8 billion in student loans; the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, which oversees research and professional and institutional development; the Office for Civil Rights, which works against unlawful discrimination in education; the Office of the General Counsel, which provides legal services to the department; and the Office of Legislative and Public Affairs, which acts as liaison between the department and the public.[16]

The department also has 21 advisory committees — quasi-public bodies that help guide policy on issues ranging from financial aid to the environmental hazards of asbestos in schools.[17]

One observer says legislation outlines the department's role in education as :

- financing high-cost programs of overriding national significance;
- financing special categories of students whose needs Congress believed are not being met by states and localities;
- advancing the cause of civil rights; and
- serving as a liaison and clearinghouse for educational research.[18]

Secretary Bell has worked to overlay those legislative priorities with administration policy. He now outlines the federal role in education as:

- providing leadership on a national scale with an emphasis on excellence;
- identifying emerging educational trends;
- providing results-oriented support to remedy gross educational disparities;
- guaranteeing equal opportunity; and
- functioning as a resource and development source.[19]

## THE EDUCATION LOBBYISTS

Washington, D.C., is home to hundreds of organizations with a vested interest in the administration of educational programs. Many of these groups have full-time lobbyists; some have several. August W. Steinhilber, head of the National School Boards Association's legislative division, says the education lobbyist's job is to know what is happening in the department each day and to anticipate actions. If a lobbyist can do this, the organization might be able to influence the department's decisions.

Stan McFarland, former head of the National Education Association's intergovernmental affairs division, says lobbyists cover the department much like a reporter's beat. In fact, education lobbyists work much as a police reporter would in a small town. They get to know the networks of people who run the place and and they strive to develop sources. NEA lobbyist Warlene Gary agrees with that characterization. She developed sources while working as a Carter-administration appointee in the department and now regularly is leaked transcripts of ongoing policy deliberation.

## PUBLICATIONS FOR THE EDUCATION REPORTER

Lobbyists agree that particular publications are key to monitoring day-to-day activities of the department. The documents listed below, ranked in order of usefulness, are considered essential tools for covering the department:

- **Federal Register** — This is the daily publication, available by subscription from the Governmental Printing Office, in which federal agencies publish meeting notices, inquiry notices, summaries of comments, proposed rule changes and regulations. Telephone numbers and agency contacts for further information accompany each item. The Register's index is difficult to use; the publication itself must be scanned daily. (As with most documents on this list, the Federal Register also is available at the Library of Congress.)
- **Unified Agenda of Federal Regulations** — Published semi-annually, this valuable edition of the Federal Register lists all new rules and rule changes issued by the agency in the last year. The edition also lists rulemaking proposed for the next year, including an abstract of the problem that the rules address, several possible solutions, a reference to current regulations, potential costs and benefits of the rules, a timetable of agency actions and agency contacts. The rules give insight into agency policy. Most changes proposed for 1983, for example, have to do with regulatory reform.
- **Education Daily** — This daily newsletter, available by subscription from Capitol Publications, Inc., stays on the cutting edge of developments in the education field. The newsletter specializes in covering events that could affect education policy but do not take place within the department. A typical issue might contain a federal court decision on handicapped education, a report on a decline in the number of black school officials, a description of new funding sources for universities and an outline of speeches made at an education convention.
- **Congressional Monitor** — For approximately $700 a year, Congressional Quarterly, Inc., will mail you their daily newsletter outlining the actions planned by the legislative branch. The Monitor lists committee and subcommittee meetings, scheduled floor actions in the House and Senate, and the status of all appropriation bills. Committee meeting topics hint at Congress' concerns about education department performance.
- **Congressional Staff Directory** — In seven color-coded

chapters, this directory lists names, positions and telephone numbers of congressional staff. Committee staff members can be valuable sources for education reporters, providing witness lists, agendas and inside information on committee actions.

- **Department of Education Organization Directory** — Because responsibility for certain programs is spread through several offices, this guide to the department frequently must be consulted. It is available from the department's Office of Public Affairs.
- **Department telephone lists** — These lists have the titles, names and numbers of people in the department. Frequently the person who works with a particular program each day can be identified from the lists. Educational organizations usually have better and more accurate lists than the department.

Education lobbyists who scan these publications have accumulated large amounts of background information on educational issues. Some lobbyists, although they are reluctant to see their names in print, are good sources of background information. Lobbyist Steinhilder, with several decades of education experience in Washington, often receives calls from reporters having trouble understanding complex legislation and rules.

## DOCUMENTS FOR THE EDUCATION REPORTER

The education department distributes money and makes rules to carry out the intent of legislation passed by Congress, as do the other 12 Cabinet-level departments. The department exercises limited oversight of programs through 10 regional offices and through federal inspectors.[20]

The legislation creating and defining the powers of the department is the U.S. Department of Education Organization Act, Public Law 96-88. Congressional hearings leading up to that legislation contain the arguments that dominate today's discussion about the department and debate on specific education programs. The department, supporters say, enhances education as a national priority and gives some coherence to scattered education programs. The department, detractors say, centralizes education in such a way that it will become a creature of politics and special interests.[21]

Those hearings and related activities generated documents useful to the journalist just starting to investigate the department. Major bills implemented by the department are the Land Ordinance Act of 1785, the Smith-Hughes Vocational Education Act, the Lanham Act (which provides aid to communities with a large federal-facility presence), the National Defense Education Act, the Civil Rights Act, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Higher Education Act, the Child Nutrition Act, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, and the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981. The bills are available at the House and Senate document rooms in the U.S. Capitol.

For fuller understanding of education legislation, the journalist should skim relevant committee reports and copies of the **Congressional Record**. In the House, most education bills are handled by the Committee on Education and Labor. In the Senate, the Committee on Labor and Human Resources handles such work. Committee reports add vitality to the language of a bill, presenting the case for legislation and offering guidance to the people who will write the regulations. If a bill or resulting regulations ever are challenged, the courts consider committee reports as the documents that explain Congress' legislative intent.

The **Congressional Record** is the transcript of floor proceedings in the House and the Senate that is published by the Government Printing Office. It contains debate surrounding the passage of legislation. The journalist reading the arguments will be alerted to what is considered important about a bill and what was the nature of opposition to a bill.

When Title I regulations targeting aid to minorities were debated in October, 1982, **Washington Post** reporter Charles Babcock used committee reports and the **Record** to write a brief history of the legislation. That piece, which ran as a sidebar to an article describing deregulation effforts, gave depth to the debate by detailing successes and failures of Title I.

The Secretary of Education is appointed by the president and is subject to confirmation by the Senate, as are education department division heads. Records of confirmation hearings often are sources of personal and financial information about appointees. Syndicated columnist Jack Anderson used those records, for example, to discover that Secretary Bell and United Nations Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick were the only non-millionaires in the Reagan Cabinet. Confirmation hearings also contain evaluations of appointees. An investigator scanning November, 1982, records, for example, would discover that several education organizations had protested the appointment of Wendy Borcherdt. The organizations charged that she lacked experience and competence.

The secretary is required to report periodically to the executive branch. The most useful of the secretary's reports for the journalist is the **U.S.Department of Education Annual Report**, which contains assessments of the previous year's programs, an outline of programs planned for the upcoming year, and budget and organization charts. The report normally tries to strike a middle ground to satisfy both the legislative intent of Congress and the executive guidance evident in documents such as the **Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents**.

Interesting news stories are one result when compromises between the executive and legislative branch prove to be impossible. In 1982, for example, the department had trouble writing student loan regulations strict enough for the president but generous enough for Congress. The department repeatedly failed to meet deadlines for drafting the regulations. Congress, suspecting the department was stalling to discourage loans, voted to continue the 1981 rules through the next year. That move effectively blocked any regulatory changes.

Other essential background documents include the **Budget of the United States** — available at libraries and the Government Printing Office — and the department budget (titled **Function 500 of the Budget of the United States**), which is available at the Office of the Under Secretary.

Journalists also should obtain copies of the **Heritage Foundation Report** and the **Urban Institute Report** on the education department. The former report, which has been used by White House officials and task forces examining the department, is a blueprint for dismantling the department.

The latter report, excerpted from the group's book, **The Reagan Experiment**, examines the effect of education budget cuts. A **Time** magazine reporter made use of that report to balance administration claims that cuts were causing no hardships.

### DEPARTMENTAL INFORMATION FOR JOURNALISTS

The Office of Public Affairs has much useful information about the department, including organization directories, telephone lists and reports. The office, for example, keeps lists of journalists interested in being contacted when news breaks. It also has an excellent clipping service. Journalists interested in particular universities can get accreditation information and reports of federal inspectors from that office. That information rarely is available at state and local levels. The reports include dispassionate evaluations of university programs and faculty.

Some information volunteered by public affairs officials, however, is suspect. A case in point is the department's magazine, **American Education**. When Reagan administration appointees came into the department, the magazine was targeted for extinction. The magazine was considered an example of how tax dollars were used to advertise and promote Great Society programs. According to a former department employee, though, the magazine was converted into a promotion piece for Reagan policies. Editors favoring a balance of articles were fired or transferred. Recent issues of **American Education** contain articles favoring tuition tax credits, school prayer and a reduced federal role in education. One issue of the magazine, however, remains useful to the journalist — the yearly **Guide to Education Programs**.

The education department sometimes is reluctant to volunteer information. An example is the Office of the Inspector General, which conducts internal investigations and looks into such abuses as school districts' misuse of grants and aliens posing as U.S. citizens to obtain student loans. Such information would be of extreme interest to the journalist investigating the department or to home-town universities and schools. But the inspector general distributes only a semi-annual, incomplete list of cases under investigation. More detailed information must be obtained through Freedom of Information Act requests.

Most FOIA requests to the department are handled by the general counsel. The inspector general's office, however, has its own FOIA division. The impact of that special setup is that many more files are closed, according to one bureaucrat.

In line with the general objective of improving education, the department spends much time and money gathering information on what is happening in universities and schools, and on conducting studies on how to remedy certain education problems. The departmental arm responsible for those activities is the National Institute of Education. The twofold mission of the institute, created in the early 1970s, is to promote educational equity and improve educational practice. Ninety-eight percent of the institute's funds are for research. The NIE generates thousands of reports each year.

The National Center for Education Statistics, the institute's division charged with compiling statistical information, seems to be set up with the time-pressed journalist in mind. NCES staff members will answer questions over the telephone and call back later with answers. They also will refer callers to a statistician expert in the subject in question. The number for that information service is (202) 436-7900.

NCES also has excellent indexes to its programs. Those include the **NCES Programs and Plans**, which outlines projects requested by the department; the **Digest of Education Statistics**, which contains abstracts of most available statistics; and publication lists, which update the digest.

The National Institute of Education does not index and store all of its reports. Instead, it contracts for that service with the Educational Resource Information Center. ERIC gathers the reports and relevant journal articles and transcripts on microfiche, which are indexed by subject. The material also is indexed in a monthly catalog, **Resources in Education**, and in a computer system. For the journalist, the advantages of the computer indexes are legion. The searches can save days of digging through documents. Searches can be tailored to the journalist's interests — be they people, programs, topics or regions. In Washington, D.C., alone, there are 15 organizations that will conduct ERIC searches.

Journalist Phil Keisling used documents available on ERIC to draw in broad brushstrokes a picture of the condition of the public schools. He used that picture, in a feature article in **Washington Monthly** magazine, as the basis for proposals he believed would improve schools.

### NON-DEPARTMENTAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Two organizations, American Education Research and Education Research Services, Inc., devote themselves to riding herd on the National Institute of Education and its reports. They can be valuable alternative sources.

Several outside watchdog agencies oversee the department. The General Accounting Office periodically investigates the department, according to one staff member, to gather information to help Congress in its deliberations or to see whether department programs carry out the intent of legislation. The agency's 5,000 person staff produces about 1,000 reports a year — many of which lead to news stories.[22]

Seven GAO reports dealt with education in fiscal year 1982. One told how some schools had been built with materials laden with asbestos, a cancer-causing substance, and alleged the education department had stopped enforcing clean-up rules. In 1978, education journalist Dan Levin used a similar report to break the asbestos-in-schools story nationally. His prize-winning series was followed up by several major news magazines and newspapers. Other 1982 reports told of defaulted student loans, services for handicapped children, and use of vacant school buildings. The agency's public information office, available at (202) 275-2812, will put journalists in contact with the staff members who prepared particular reports and will provide additional documentation.

The GAO has several auditors permanently assigned to the education department. They often will say what topics are under investigation. Their telephone number is (202) 245-9623.

A frequently overlooked agency that acts as a watchdog of the education department is the White House Office of Management and Budget. OMB's functions for the executive branch are similar to the GAO's functions for Congress. In

fiscal year 1982, OMB tracked and filed the 156 forms that the department used to find out what was going on in America's education system and how its programs were working. A journalist browsing through those forms at the docket library in the New Executive Office Building would find, for example, a survey on the federal role in education that was sent to local schools. Such a survey would help in writing a story about the justifications for dismantling the department. While administration officials characterize the department as a bureaucratic monster, local schools seem to prefer dealing with it to dealing with several agencies.

The choicest information from these forms is of use to journalists outside Washington. The **Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey**, for example, measures minority segregation in cities and regions — by classroom, special services and academic subject. Information from a survey of "institutions operated or supported by a state agency for neglected or delinquent children and children in adult correctional institutions" could be used to tip hometown reporters to local institutions ripe for investigation.

A little-known department watchdog is the Advisory Committee on Intergovernmental Relations. This quasi-public body, charged with investigating interactions of local, state, and federal governments, looks into the education department approximately every three years. When it does, lots of financial information and intergovernmental feuds are aired. Committee records would be valuable to an investigator interested in federalism.

Congress also examines the department through reports of the Congressional Research Service. These reports are made at the request of individual legislators. In 1982, a congressman advocating cuts in student aid made a political point with a CRS report. That report showed a number of education department employees had defaulted on their student loans. CRS reports are available, as is the status and a description of all education legislation, through the Scorpio computer system at the Library of Congress.

## PRIVATE EDUCATION GROUPS

**PACs Americana**, the guide to political action committees that try to influence elections through campaign contributions, lists 33 education political action committees. That long list doesn't include PACs such as the AFL-CIO's, which looks at candidates' stands on education issues before making contributions. Some education PACs are sponsored by parent organizations. The NEA sponsors seven PACs; the American Federation of Teachers sponsors two. Several specialty PACs, such as the National Hispanic Council and the Science and Technology PAC, are independent.[23]

Approximately 300 organizations whose main concern is education are listed in **Washington Representatives**, a yearly directory of the approximately 10,000 lobbyists, consultants, legal advisers, public affairs specialists and interest groups in the nation's capital. The directory, compiled from public documents such as Federal Election Commission records and Congress' list of registered lobbyists, is a useful guide to groups that devote much of their time to monitoring the department and educational legislation and issues.

The private groups are advocates, striving to better the lot of the people they represent. Education groups frequently are privy to sensitive information. The Council of Chief State School Officers, because it represents state school superintendents with direct access to the Secretary of Education, often sees internal agency memos. Such groups can provide insightful counters to official viewpoints. A journalist should read through a group's legislative agenda, which is a laundry list of what the group wants from government, before instilling credence in a group's pronouncements. For the journalist's purposes, education groups can be divided roughly into two categories: generalists and specialists.

The generalists are large, multi-million dollar groups whose interests run the gamut of education. The National School Boards Association, for example, represents most of the nation's 95,000 school board members, nearly one-third of all elected officials in the country. The primary focus of the association, despite its being a strong supporter of the education department, is increasing local control of schools. The National Education Association had seven presidential hopefuls come courting at its 1981 convention. The NEA, which evolved from an organization promoting professional growth to become a vigorous advocate of teacher welfare and certain social causes, is one of the largest professional employee organizations in the country. It has 1.5 million members and the ability to raise huge sums of money.

School bureaucrats, who outnumber school board members and have substantial control over public education, are represented by a host of organizations, including the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, and the Association of Supervisers of Curriculum Development. The most prominent organizations concerned with colleges and universities are the American Council on Education and the American Association of Land Grant Colleges and Universities.

Some of these groups have well-staffed legislative divisions that produce slick, opinionated policy papers. For example: A recent National School Boards Association policy package on impending legislation, the **National Education and Economic Redevelopment Act of 1982**, included a copy of the bill, the introducing member's floor statement, NSBA testimony on the bill, the Congressional committee's hearing report, a bill summary and analysis, two papers by education professors and several newspaper clippings. National Education Association policy papers are laid out in magazine format, often clarifying major points with graphs, charts and cartoons.

The summaries and analyses offered by these groups are becoming increasingly important to journalists. As the Reagan administration continues to deregulate, Congress — fearful that its legislative intent is being thwarted — responds by drafting more and more complex bills, according to one lobbyist. Thus, de facto regulation is making bills more time-consuming to read and more difficult to understand. A new reporter on the **Executive Educator** magazine recalls his shock when handed a copy of the **Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981**: "I was on deadline, and the guy gives me a bill as thick as a Victorian novel."

Bill summaries by NSBA, NEA and the American Council on Education are excellent. They generally are balanced because they are meant to inform members of the content of legislation before Congress. For the journalist, the most useful documents these generalist groups produce are annual budget analyses, bill summaries and analyses, and bio-

graphies of political appointees to the department.

Specialist groups are smaller organizations interested in a single issue or a facet of an issue. A journalist researching a topical story would find such groups good sources of detailed information. Examples of such specialized groups include the Council for American Private Enterprise, the National Association of Biology Teachers, the Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf and the American Association of Sex Educators and Counselors. Universities and state departments of education also maintain lobbyists in Washington.

Education groups have a trade press, ranging from newsletters distributed within a branch of the education department to subscription magazines distributed throughout the country. According to **Hudson's Washington Directory**, Washington has 95 publications that cover only education. Capitol Publications, Inc., alone produces 17 education newsletters.

Articles and information in these publications can be arcane, but sometimes can lead to major stories. The **American School Board Journal**, for example, recently investigated Ku Klux Klan recruiting activities in schools. Publication of the story was soon followed by abbreviated forms of the article in weekly news magazines and in some newspapers.

The journalist intent on keeping abreast of education developments should scan these publications:

- **Chronicle of Higher Education** — A thick, weekly newspaper that concentrates on post-secondary education. It features a front-page index to contents and articles from correspondents in various parts of the country and world.
- **Higher Education Daily** — Available by subscription from Capitol Publications, Inc., this newsletter monitors developments affecting colleges and universities.
- **School Board News** — A twice-a-month newspaper, this publication concentrates on public education, telling people outside of Washington what is happening there.
- **Education Times** and **Education Week** — These national weekly newspapers compete as would two dailies in a small town, and cover the gamut of educational issues.

It is almost a cliche to say that documents are only as good as the people behind them. Yet education journalists and department observers agree that documents should be used with that principle in mind. GAO audits lead naturally to the auditors, and program evaluations lead to the people involved with the evaluation.

Documents are the essential starting point, according to one education journalist. They furnish story ideas. They furnish background essential for informed interviewing and knowledgeable reporting. They even provide source lists. "After that, it just depends how good you are."

The people who work with specific programs each day almost never are contacted by journalists. They are career bureaucrats who have outlived several administrations, trade press reporters with years on specialized beats and lobbyists whose life work has been several pieces of legislation. Intelligent use of documents should plug journalists into such networks of sources.

FOOTNOTES

1. W. Vance Grant, "Statistics of the Month," **American Education**, August/September 1982, back cover.
2. **School Board News**, 13 October 1982, p. 5.
3. Hearing testimony of Terrel Bell, **House Committee on Education and Labor**, 21 September 1982.
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